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PEOPLE AND THEIR HOMES

IN

GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS,

IN

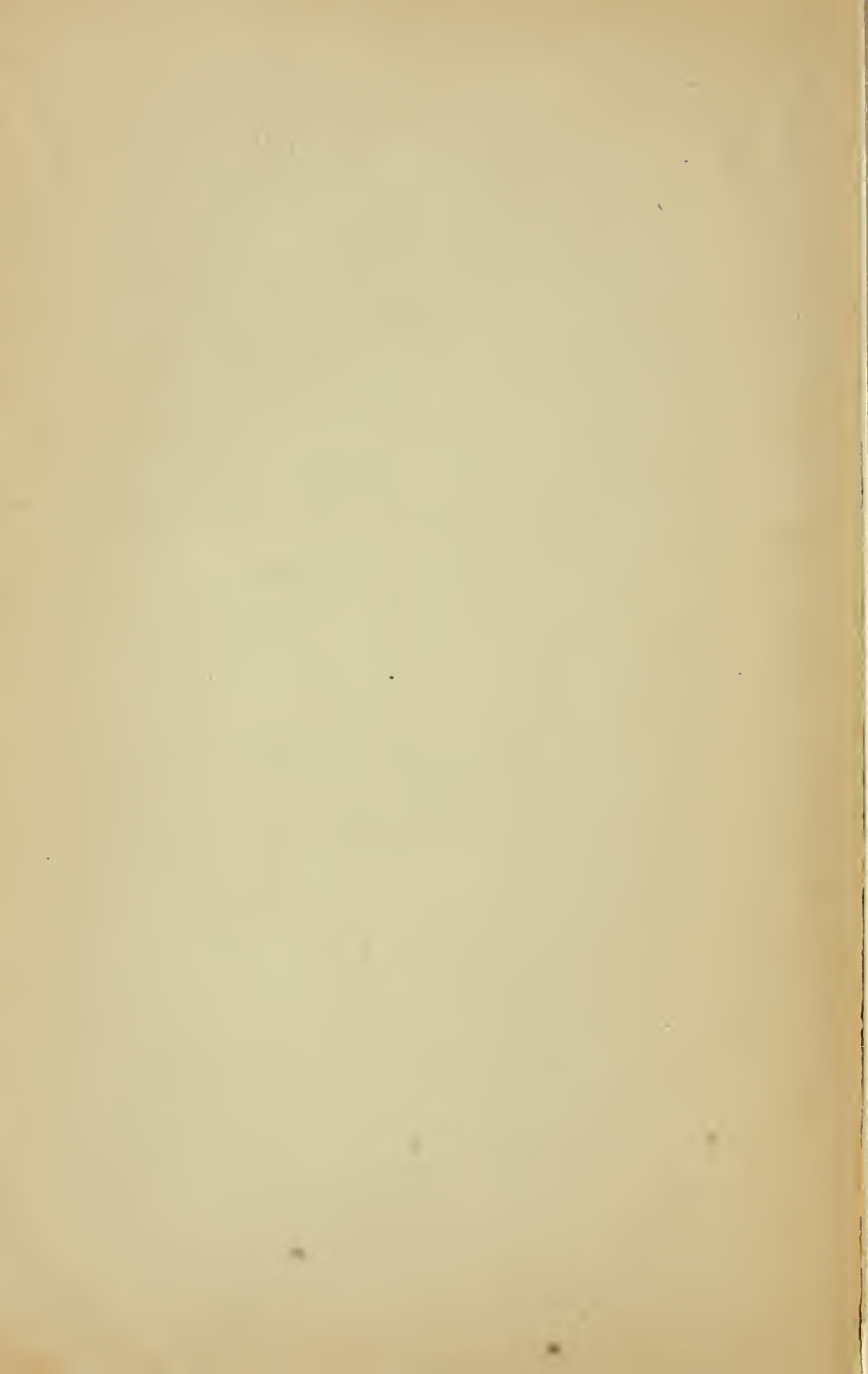
OLDEN TIME.

BY

FRANCIS MARION BOUTWELL.

GROTON:

1890.



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CHAPTER I.

FACTS ABOUT SEVERAL PERSONS AND SEVERAL THINGS.

Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth's father, known in his later years as Major Amos Farnsworth, was in the battle of Bunker Hill. He was then twenty-one years of age, and was wounded twice in that fight, one ball entering his arm and another scraping the skin off of his side. On the 10th of October, 1880, as my minutes show, while calling upon Miss Farnsworth, reference was made to the theory entertained by some persons that General Putnam was in command of the American forces at this battle. I asked her what her father said of what he saw and did there, and if he ever intimated that any other than Colonel William Prescott was in command. She replied that her father always said that Colonel Prescott was the commander, and that she had never heard anything to the contrary until recent years. She said that her father was an under officer, probably a non-commissioned officer. Of all men engaged in the battle of Bunker Hill, Major Farnsworth was fully as likely to know what position Colonel Prescott held on that day as could have been known by any other man there, for Major Farnsworth's father and mother were both own cousins to Colonel Prescott, and were cousins to each other, and Prescott lived only about seven miles from Farnsworth's home in what was then the District of Pepperell, but a part of Groton, incorporated later as a separate town.

Miss Farnsworth stated that her father told her that when the ammunition was gone Prescott turned to those of his men who were within hearing, and said: "We have fired all our powder away, and must get away the best way we can." And upon that the retreat commenced. Major Farnsworth

heard his cousin make this remark. He told his daughter, and she repeated it to me. Within an hour after this conversation with Miss Farnsworth I made the minutes that are now the guide to my memory.

Major Farnsworth also made the same statement to his daughter that we get from other sources, viz., That when Colonel Prescott was leaving the field he met General Putnam, and asked him why he did not come up and support him, to which the General replied that he "could not drive the dogs along;" and Colonel Prescott said, "You should have *led* them, General." It is well known that General Putnam was a very rough man in his manner.

Under all the circumstances, and in view of his relationship to Colonel Prescott, it does not seem possible that Major Farnsworth could have been in error as to who commanded at that memorable battle.

Colonel Prescott was born in Groton, at the south end of the village. The site of his father's home is described on page 9 of my "Old Homesteads."

Quite a number of the "Arcadian farmers" were brought to Groton after they were removed from Nova Scotia in 1755, and Miss Farnsworth once told me that one of these families lived upon the west side of what we now know as the old road to Ayer, and at the top of the hill a short distance north of No. 2 (Moors) schoolhouse. There is now a house upon the site, but it is not the same building. Miss Farnsworth may have learned this fact from her grandmother, whom she remembered well, or perhaps even from her father, who was born in 1754.

Miss Farnsworth gave me an interesting account of the purchase by the town of the northern portion of what we

now know as the old burying ground, the southerly part having been added subsequently.

The original purchase was made of the Rev. Gershom Hobart toward the end of the seventeenth or very early in the last century. The town neglected to pay for the land until Mr. Hobart became very much out of patience; and though several burials had been made, he threatened that if the amount agreed upon were not forthcoming and the transaction closed, he would proceed to plough and cultivate the land. This threat had no effect, and so he commenced to carry it into execution by ploughing, but only a few furrows round the outer edge of the ground were required to bring the town to terms, and the money was paid. Mr. Hobart, as the minister, had more or less trouble with the people, and the ill feeling that prevailed on both sides no doubt had its influence in this matter. Miss Farnsworth said that when she was a child there were ridges noticeable round the outside of the burying ground, that were said to be the remains of Mr. Hobart's furrows.

Miss Farnsworth once told me that she remembered, when a child, her grandmother, Lydia Longley Farnsworth, had an old pin cushion which she told her was a gift received when a young girl from her aunt, Lydia Longley, who was in the convent of Notre Dame at Montreal. Mrs. Farnsworth told her granddaughter that having been named for her aunt, that lady sent little gifts from time to time during her childhood.

Lydia Longley was the oldest of the children of William Longley, taken captive in 1694 by Indians and carried to Canada. The site of their home is marked by the tablet near the house of Zachariah Fitch. The sad story of the fate of the unfortunate family has been often told. Mrs. Farn-

worth's father, John Longley, was captured at the same time, but escaped after a few years and returned to Groton.

Lydia remained in Montreal, was converted to the Roman Catholic faith, and on Tuesday, April 24, 1696, was baptized. She remained in the convent above referred to the rest of her life, and Mrs. Farnsworth never saw her. In August, 1880, being at Montreal, I went to the house of the parish priest of the parish of Notre Dame, and there saw the original record of the baptism of Lydia Longley, to which her signature was attached. The record was of course in the French language, but I secured a certified copy, and also a translation of the copy, besides a tracing of the signature.

At the time of the Indian assault upon the Longley family, father, mother, and five children were killed, and Miss Farnsworth said she always understood that one other person, an inmate of the house but not a member of the family, was killed also, making eight in all. They were laid in one grave and upon the premises. Until within about fifty years the mound was carefully preserved, but all trace of it has now disappeared. I have, however, taken some pains to ascertain exactly where it was, and will give the result of my investigation.

Mr. Abel Lawrence, of Groton, lived upon the same farm when a boy, and he says that he remembers sitting upon the mound many times. In December, 1881, I went with Mr. Lawrence to the place and asked him to locate the grave according to the best of his memory. His father and grandfather both had lived there, and he says that the latter set out an apple tree to mark the spot. Mr. Lawrence remembers the tree, and says that it never bore fruit. He indicated the place where the apple tree stood, and we then ran the following lines: Measure from the centre of the front of the Longley monument in a straight line toward the road,

17 feet 8 inches, then make a right angle north, run a line 52 feet and you reach the place where the tree stood. This spot is 81 feet 9 inches from the fence along the road in a straight line. A sister of Mr. Lawrence is of the same opinion as to the location of the grave.

Miss Farnsworth once told me that she had been a reader of the newspapers since the beginning of this century, and that she used to read aloud to her parents the accounts of the campaigns of the first Napoleon before the battle of Waterloo. She said that her father, in those days, subscribed for the only paper that was taken by any one between the villages of Shirley and Groton; and it was but a weekly, as daily papers are of comparatively recent origin.

Miss Farnsworth gave me an interesting account of the death of her grandfather, Amos Farnsworth, senior, and his son Benjamin, who were drowned in the Nashua river the 5th of December, 1775. She said that Mr. Farnsworth had sheep in pasture upon his island, now owned by Hon. Daniel Needham. It was thought they attempted to take the sheep from the island, one or two at a time in a boat, as winter was at hand, but no other person was with them. The supposition was that they bound the animals, placed them in the boat, and started for the main land, and that they were upset by the struggling of the sheep. Men at a distance heard Mr. Farnsworth call to his son in an encouraging manner to keep calm, for he was coming. The men feared that there was trouble, and hurried to the bank of the river, but when they arrived both had gone down. The remains of Benjamin were soon found, but the body of Mr. Farnsworth was not recovered when the river froze. As soon as spring opened, his son, Miss Farnsworth's father, walked down the

river to see if the body had been washed ashore. When he saw anything on the opposite bank, and was in doubt what it might be, he would throw a stone over, and usually could tell by the sound what it was. He went on thus to near where the Hollis railroad depot now stands, where he found the remains. The body had been carried by the current not less than ten miles. This experience, together with the battle of Bunker Hill, which occurred in June preceding, made an eventful year for Major Farnsworth, then but twenty-one years old.

The home of Amos Farnsworth, senior, was just below the present site of Charles H. Joy's barn, on the same side of the road to Shirley, and his farm extended back to the river. The house, now occupied by Mr. Joy's foreman, was built under the supervision of Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth in the year 1834, before the death of her father, but after he was an old man. Major Farnsworth had previously occupied the old house just described. The house that now stands below Mr. Joy's barn was built for and occupied by Luke, a brother of Miss Elizabeth.

The island which I have described was originally attached to the main land on the east side of the river, and the whole was known as "The Neck," the river making a great bend and flowing through the channel which we now call "Dead River," and which is about seven-eighths of a mile in length. As a result of the constant wearing of the land of the neck by the tendency of the river to make a straight course, the water finally broke through, leaving the western end of the neck as an island between the old channel on the west and the present main stream on the east. There is reason to suppose that this action of the waters occurred in the winter of 1750.

CHAPTER II.

CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

Upon farther investigation, I find that I was mistaken in my statement found on page 2 of my pamphlet entitled "Old Homesteads of Groton, Massachusetts," where I give the place of residence of Ellis Barron. It seems that he must have lived at the south end of the village, and probably upon the Stuart J. Park place, now owned by Francis F. Woods. It is a fact, as I state on page 8 of the above-named pamphlet, that Jonas Prescott lived upon this estate, but that was not until the return of the inhabitants after the destruction of the town by the Indians, which occurred March 13, 1676. But Ellis Barron's lands were granted to him in the year 1666; and after the burning of the town he returned to Watertown, from whence he originally came.

James Knop probably lived on the present Main street, and near where the house of the late John G. Park stands. This land was granted to Knop in 1669. The house lots of Knop and Barron were both bounded on the east by the highway and west by Broad Meadow End, which was the south end of that meadow.

I have not mentioned James Knop's home in either of my previous publications, for though I have examined the description of his lands repeatedly, it was not until recently that I was able to decide where he lived.

In connection with my account of the home of James Blood on page 2 of "Old Homesteads," I will state that since that pamphlet was written I have been with Mr. George D. Brigham to the old cellar to which I have there referred. We left the present road at the eastern end of the narrow cut

through which the road passes, and went into the woods in a direction about due north, and for a distance not exceeding a quarter of a mile, where we found an old cellar, which I firmly believe belonged to the house of James Blood.

I would correct what I say on the last-named page of the same pamphlet in regard to the residence of Nathaniel Blood, by stating that he probably lived on the west side of Gibbet Hill, near its base and about one-eighth of a mile west of the barn formerly owned by Andrew Spaulding, and now the property of Hon. Daniel Needham. Traces of a cellar are still to be seen, and I am informed by those older than myself that forty years ago the cellar was plainly visible.

In connection with the house which has for many years been occupied by Luther G. Osborn, I can state, in addition to what I have said of it on page 10 of "Old Homesteads," that I was informed by Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth that Eleazer Green built it when he was about to take as his wife Elizabeth, a daughter of Jonas Prescott and a sister of Benjamin, the father of Colonel William Prescott. The house stands upon land originally owned by William Green, the father of Eleazer, who lived near where Lawrence Academy stands, as mentioned on page 4 of "Old Homesteads," and owned land upon both sides of the great road. I do not find in what year the marriage took place, but I do find that their first child was born in January, 1696. It thus appears that this, the oldest house in Groton, as I believe, was probably built a year or two before that time, perhaps about the year 1694. It has recently been sold and will soon be moved to another site.

The next oldest house in town is probably the one now owned by Charles B. Baldwin, which stands next north of the house of Andrew Spaulding on Hollis street. It has undergone extensive repairs, and the additions on the north

side, as well as the piazza, have been built within comparatively recent years, but some portion of the house was first erected in the year 1706. In the early days religious teaching was maintained at the public expense, and not by societies as now, and this house was built by the town for a parsonage. The vote providing for its construction is found in the Indian Roll. The vote provided for a lean-to eleven feet wide, to extend the entire length of the north side of the house, but this has long since disappeared. The dimensions for the building are set forth in the vote, and the width there given varies but little from that of the present house. Its length, however, is several feet more than was provided for originally. The town also voted to build a small barn with the house. The meeting house, the second built in town, then stood upon the common near where the Chaplin school is now situated.

On page 10 of my "Old Homesteads" I give the place where stood early in the last century, and for more than one hundred years later, the house originally owned by Benjamin Farnsworth. Clifford R. Weld built a farm house there a few years ago, and he found an old well, which now comes in the cellar of this new house. Mr. George D. Brigham remembers the old house, and says that this is the well which belonged to it.

Again in the same pamphlet, and on page 10 thereof, I refer to the home of John Longley as being the so-called Stephen Kendall place. Jackson N. Potter sold the house not long ago, and a large part of the farm, to the Groton School. After the purchase, Charles F. Peabody, while engaged in repairing the house, found indications of great age. Among other evidences he found laths fastened with wooden pins instead of nails, notably in the north front room. I am, in view of these facts, of the opinion that some portion at

least of this house was built by John Longley. He was great-grandfather of the late Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth, and his daughter Lydia, Miss Farnsworth's grandmother, was born on that place in 1716, and it seems not unlikely that she may have first seen the light within these very walls.

General Henry Woods, who was major of Colonel William Prescott's regiment at the battle of Bunker Hill, lived on the great road, within the limits of Pepperell. The house is still standing, a short distance back from the road, on the east side thereof and nearly opposite to the building known as the Coburn brick tavern.

Caleb Woods, a brother of General Henry Woods, and later his son Caleb, lived at the east part of the town, near the crotch of the roads about a quarter of a mile east of the house where George W. Woodward now lives. The cellar can still be seen on the west side of the road leading north. Tub Meadow, which is a short distance east of Mr. Woodward's house and on the same side of the road, was formerly a part of the Caleb Woods farm. This farm was at one time within the limits of Dunstable, but when the line between the two towns was straightened, toward the end of the last century, this place was brought into Groton. Noah Woods, now of Fitchburg but formerly of Bangor, Maine, is a grandson of Caleb Woods, senior.

The farm near Baddacook pond known as the John Sawtell place and now owned and occupied by Arthur W. Shattuck, was, many years ago, the home of Joseph Bennett. A story is told of a very strange experience through which Mr. Bennett passed. It is narrated that on one occasion he started in the small hours of the morning with a load of produce which he intended to carry to Charlestown. As he proceeded along the road he became impressed with the feeling that something was wrong at home, and so strong did that im-

pression become that upon reaching Bedford he resolved to return. Upon his arrival he found that his house had been destroyed by fire. It was so early in the morning that the family were still sleeping. Most of them escaped, but the youngest child, Kate, was burned to death. This occurred in the autumn of 1811, and the present house was built by Mr. Bennett, probably in the following year, to replace the one destroyed. Joseph Bennett was Captain Asa S. Lawrence's maternal grandfather.

In connection with the home of the old sexton, Timothy Allen, described on pages 1 and 2 of "Old Homesteads," I would say that my father has told me recently that since he bought the land, now many years ago, he filled in a well there. The place where the well was situated is still visible, and is just at the edge of the hard land close by Little Half-Moon Meadow, and at some distance back from Martin's Pond road. This would indicate that Mr. Allen's house was situated a few rods farther east than I described it in my former pamphlet, but back from the road, as there stated. The well above described probably belonged to Timothy Allen's house, for it was not in a place where it could be of any use in later years, so far as is known.

On page 7 of my pamphlet entitled "Old Highways and Landmarks of Groton, Massachusetts," where I mention a road that passed along the eastern base of the hill upon which my father's barns stand, it would be more accurate to say the southern base of the hill.

On page 11 of "Old Highways and Landmarks" I refer to the old mill, which was the first grist mill of which we have knowledge. Jonas Prescott run the mill, though it

was built by his father, John Prescott, of Lancaster. Jonas was at the time a young man. Jonas Prescott afterward moved to Groton village. On page 8 of my "Old Homesteads" I describe the situation of his house.

In describing the location of the old mill definitely, I would state that it was on Nonacoicus brook, a short distance west of the road from Ayer to Harvard, and within the present limits of Harvard. There is a mill now on or near the old site where glue is manufactured.

I am indebted to Mrs. Sarah (Capell) Gilson for the following information in regard to the mills in Groton owned and run by her father, John Capell. He came to town in 1793, and Mrs. Gilson was born in Groton in November of that year. Mr. Capell purchased saw and grist mills that stood upon the present site of Messrs. Tileston & Hollingsworth's paper mills. He bought with the property a one-story house which was then old. The original purchase was made in company with a man named Cook, who subsequently sold his interest to Mr. Capell. Mrs. Gilson says that the mills were not new at the time her father bought them, but of whom the purchase was made she does not know.

Mrs. Gilson well remembers the death of General Washington, which occurred in December, 1799, and she says that at that time they were living in the old house, but that her father was then building a new one, and they moved into it soon after. That new house is the one now standing opposite to the paper mills and on the corner of the great road and the Nod road. This house, then, is just about as old as this century.

Until 1823 the Nod road intersected with the great road a short distance south of this present Capell house above described, so that in old times Mr. Capell's house and mills were all in his grounds together, with no road between them.

The great road, however, crossed the river then in the same place as now, and the bridge was known as Capell's bridge.

Near where the Nod road crosses Nod brook, a short distance east of the paper mills and south of the road, can now be seen traces of the old road as it existed up to 1823. The location of the road from this point to the four corners at Nod does not seem to have been changed.

Dr. Oliver Prescott, senior, lived where the house of the late John B. Sanderson stands, which is now owned by Parker Fletcher. In the evening of the first day of February, 1815, the house was entirely consumed by fire. It had previously, however, passed out of the hands of Dr. Prescott's family. At the time it was burned it was owned by one John Wethered, and was set on fire in the upper story by a servant of the family. Though a wooden building, its destruction was remarkably slow, occupying several hours. After all the furniture had been removed, the house was dismantled by taking out the doors, windows, &c. Lieutenant William Bancroft, who then owned the old John J. Graves place on Farmers' Row, now the property of the Groton School, was about to build the house at present occupied by the foreman of the school. These doors and windows were sold at auction, and Lieutenant Bancroft bought a part, if not all of them, for his new house, and it is not improbable that some of them still remain.

The ruins of the Prescott house stood for a number of years, until the present dwelling was built by Miss Susan Prescott, a daughter of Judge James and a great niece of Dr. Oliver and Colonel William Prescott. She there kept a boarding-school for young ladies.

The burning of the Prescott house was the event that first put it in the minds of citizens to form the old Fire Club,

which was organized only a few days after, on February 4, 1815.

The house now owned by Lawrence Academy and situated south of the school building was built by James Brazer, Esq., about the year 1802. The house that preceded this upon the same site was burned in January of that year. The town had no conveniences for extinguishing fires, the weather was very cold, and the house was entirely destroyed. Loammi Baldwin, junior, a son of the distinguished engineer, was then studying law in Groton. He went to the fire, and seeing the need of an engine, concluded that he could build one. He did most of the work in the cabinet shop of Jonathan Loring, the iron work being done in the blacksmith shop opposite. Mr. Loring's shop stood about where William H. Bruce's drug store is situated. He there had the use of wood-working tools. This same engine, known as "Torrent No. 1," has lasted from the year 1802 until now, and has done great service at fires within recent years. It is at present kept at West Groton, and is the only engine there, except the fire apparatus at the leather-board mill.

Young Baldwin boarded with Dr. Oliver Prescott, senior, and in the house previously described. Mrs. Prescott was a cousin of his father. Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth told me that she remembered the young man well. He dropped the law and followed in the footsteps of his father, in which profession he, too, became distinguished. Baldwin studied law in the office of the Hon. Timothy Bigelow. This distinguished lawyer, together with Hon. Samuel Dana, had his office in a small building that stood near the present site of my father's dwelling, but now forms the southerly half of the house near the railroad station which has a brick basement. After the above-named tenants had left the building, it was occupied by Hon. Luther Lawrence as a law

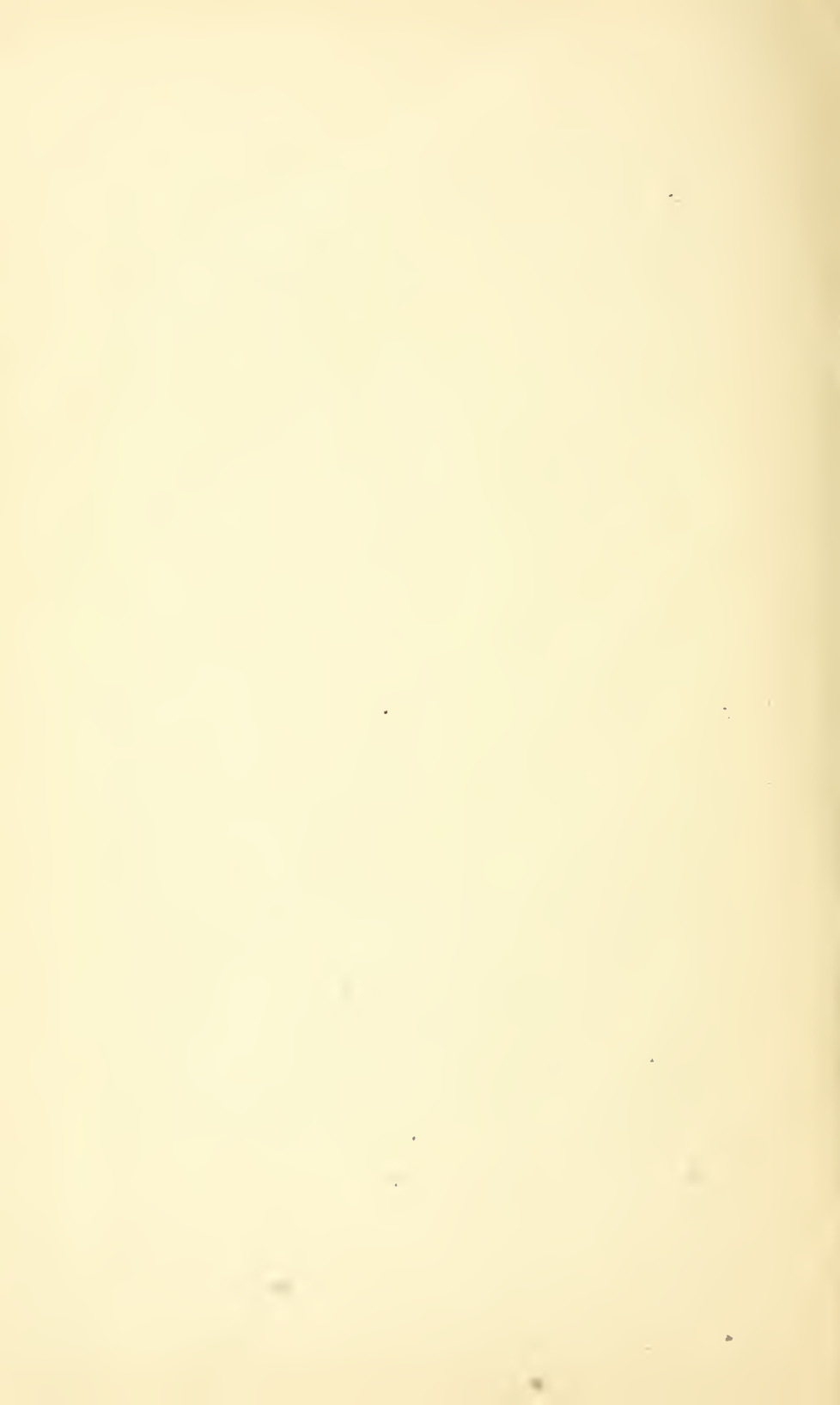
office, later by Dr. Amos Bancroft, a leading physician in Groton, and his son, Dr. Amos B. Bancroft, used it for the same purpose. He built and occupied the house where Captain Asa S. Lawrence lives. The old office was moved to the place where it now stands more than thirty years ago.

The great road, in the north part of the village, was straightened in the year 1797, or in any event soon after that time, for in book No. 5, page 152, of the town records there appears a report of a committee who had arranged with Captain Jephtha Richardson to let the town have a certain part of his lands situated where the main street now is and between the present site of the Calvin Childs blacksmith shop, now occupied by Thomas Bywater, and the house of Miss Harriet Hemenway. In exchange for this Captain Richardson was to have the land then used for the road, near the south side of the old graveyard. This report was submitted to a town meeting held in May, 1797. Up to that time the main road, after crossing James' Brook, was the present Hollis street to a point near where the house of Zara Patch now stands: it then passed near the south side of the burying ground, coming close to the present site of Miss Hemenway's house, and it was so located that the house now owned by Mrs. Lydia Hodgman fronted upon it. The old road then kept upon the high land a short distance west of the present highway to a point nearly opposite to where Deacon William Livermore lives, where the road was the same as it now is. The original main road of two hundred years ago, however, was the present Hollis street in its entire length, and so on to the river, where the village of East Pepperell is now situated. The location of the great

road south of James' Brook has been changed but a very little since the beginning of the town.

The land for the present main road between the corner of Main and Hollis streets and a point near the blacksmith's shop above mentioned was taken from the estate of Samuel Tarbell, who had died a short time before the improvement was made. His house stood where the store of the late Thomas K. Stevens, now occupied by Messrs. William J. Boynton & Son, stands, and his barn was the main part of the present barn of Colonel Daniel Needham that joins his house, though it is hardly necessary to state that Colonel Needham's house did not then exist. So that the new road was built through Mr. Tarbell's dooryard and between his house and barn. The Tarbell house now stands on the south side of Court street and is owned by Frank L. Blood.

The late Charles Woolley, of Waltham, but formerly of Groton, once gave me an interesting account of Samuel Tarbell. He said that Mr. Tarbell joined the British army during the Revolutionary war, and as a result all his real estate in Groton was confiscated except his house above described and twenty-four acres of land about the house. Under these circumstances it is perhaps not strange that Mr. Tarbell did not entertain the kindest of feelings toward his fellow-townsmen, who probably had very little sympathy for him. The subject of straightening the road was agitated for some time before the improvement was made and before the death of Mr. Tarbell, and it was said that he threatened to shoot the first man who attempted to take down his fence for the purpose of building the new road; but as he passed away before the final day came, we are not permitted to know whether he would have carried his threat into execution.





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